

NEWS RELEASE

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COMMUNITY RESPONDS TO DEATH OF TWO TEENS

Relationship Violence is Focus of Summit

Two years ago, Casondra Stewart (age 17) and Tamara Smith (age 16) were killed by their boyfriends. Did Casondra and Tamara die in vain?

The response to that question is the genesis for tomorrow's Teen Summit, which will focus on violence among teens in dating relationships. The Summit will lay the foundation for developing action plans to help chart a new course for the way law enforcement, educators, victims advocates, criminal justice officials, medicals professionals, social service agencies and teens respond to relationship violence.

The event will take place from 8:30am until 11:30am, at the Schaetzel Center of Scripps Memorial Hospital, 9888 Genessee Avenue, and is open to the public.

"If the community wants to do something to stop teen dating violence, then teenagers must be involved in finding the solutions," said DeSean Bailey of the San Diego Youth Congress. "We're proud to be in partnership with the Domestic Violence Council on this project, and we are committed to continuing this partnership to stop domestic violence among our peers," he said.

San Diego City Attorney Casey Gwinn will unveil the results of a qualitative analysis commissioned by San Diego City Schools that exposes weaknesses in how the community as a whole responds to the issue of relationship violence among teens. Breakout sessions will focus on identifying action items, prioritizing issues and implementing plans to create solutions for a comprehensive community response to teen relationship violence in the future.

"The death of Tamara and Casondra served as a wake up call for those of us in the Domestic Violence Community that more had to be done to effectively reach out to young people," said City Attorney Casey Gwinn, who also serves as president of the San Diego Domestic Violence Council. "We have pledged to never let a victim die in vain. It is our responsibility to do all we can to prevent teen violence, make teenage victims safer and hold batterers accountable, regardless of age," said Gwinn.

"Without intervention, bad teen behavior becomes bad adult behavior," added District Attorney Paul Pfingst. "Our challenge is to break cycles of violence before teen habits are fixed. Delay can mean disaster," he said of the summit.

A special feature of the summit will include a performance by the BEAR Players (the acronym stands for Be Educated And Responsible) an all Indian youth theater group.

In addition, three groups of teens will be recognized for their efforts in increasing awareness and decreasing tolerance for violence. The "Hand in

Hand, Take a Stand" service awards will be presented to these deserving teens in honor and memory of Tamara Smith and Casondra Stewart. The event will be attended by the parents and family members of the murdered teens.

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